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## ABSTRACT

In this interview (funded via a Title III Elementary Secondary Education Act grant) the roots of progressive education are revealed as Marian Brooks recounts the beginnings of her teaching career in 1924 at the age of 15 in a one room rural New Hampshire school. The interviewer's questions encompass the: (1) nature of the early teacher preparatory programs; (2) involvement and interaction between the teacher and the community; (3) composition of the community; (4) relationship between the student and the teacher; (5) development of curriculum and curriculum guidelines; (6) models for child development; (7) common educational activities; (8) physical facilities; (9) academic assessment; (10) school district policies; (11) administrative philosophy and procedure; (12) interaction between teachers within the district; (13) salaries; (14) differences between various early educational philosophies; and (15) child centered approach vs the learning centered approach to education. This interview describes an emphasis on child centered, informal learning situations born out of the necessity to facilitate learning in a one room, one teacher school and to utilize integrated grade levels and family and community resources and involvement. (JC)

*Recollections  
of a  
One-Room  
Schoolhouse*

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Ruth Dropkin, Editor

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# Introduction

by

## Lillian Weber

As we planned for a conference on the Roots of Open Education in America, Marian Brooks and I considered how much there is in the past that we would want to revive for young people's use. To begin with, we of course turned to progressive education as the obvious source. We wanted to evoke for students, to strengthen their present work, the serious longitudinal child development studies from Iowa, from Merrill-Palmer, from Bank Street, the Dewey School experience, the Eight-Year Study. But we soon realized that our approach was too academic, suitable for a bibliography. As we talked books and bibliographies, we began to think not so much of research reports as of *Little Women*, *Son of the Middle Border*, *Little Town on the Prairie*, *My Antonia* -- a whole literature reflecting community life, institutions and values on which progressive education was able to build.

In what soil in our own past did progressive education and later, open education take root? For Marian what first came to mind was her one-room schoolhouse experience which preceded her study of the ideas of progressive education. But from what experience did she draw -- alone, a girl of 15 -- to support her work? She drew on her own experiences in a big family, her own participation in the work and life of her neighborhood, her own developing interests in nature study and in mythology. For my part, I joined . Marian in recollecting my own experiences as middle child in a big family, each one of us different. My recollections included reflections on these differences -- never related to any uncertainty about place in the family, for that was defined by membership. But other experiences also were remembered -- two weeks of Chautauqua when I lived in West Virginia, my father's comments on Labor Schools and his education through union work, joining Settlement House activities, the experiences I heard described when I lived in Virginia of the

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Highlander Folk School -- and much more. Later there was the study of progressive education, of institutional planning for children.

What was it that seemed to me to relate my earlier experiences to this planned study? What indeed was central to these experiences and the development of open education? The community? The preservation of the cultural inheritance? The intergenerational character of the experiences? All these and more, for inherent in all was an offering of educative experiences to the learner without selection mechanisms or certification systems or prior qualifications. Indeed, as Marian and I mulled over the experiences we had pulled out of our memories, such offerings and such reception of the willing learner seemed to be the expectation of many groups in their vision of America, particularly the immigrants who in their coming challenged their inherited class and educational status and asserted themselves as people with potential. They organized cultural experiences to sustain them in this strange land; they joined many educational enterprises -- literary societies, singing clubs, and so on -- to help find their own path to self-fulfillment without old-world constraints. They of course used the public schools as well as these extra-school experiences, but it is clear from the number of communal educational groups that the schools provided insufficient nutrients for the ordinary man's drive for further development and cultural continuity.

It was confidence in the human as learner that inspired progressive educators, and the learning itself, which they studied in their effort to revitalize the schools. Whether English or American, they drew on what they knew of the learner, as observed in informal settings -- family experiences and the communal cultural experiences -- and they tried to figure out how to plan for, maintain and keep continuous the vigor of this informal learning within the schools. The sensitive educators who planned the Dewey School, for instance, reacted to what they interpreted as the drying up of available informal educative experiences and attempted to revive their nutritive force in the learning process by including them in schools.

And so, as we organized our conference we agreed that these many informal and communal educational experiences *are* our roots which at this time we celebrate.

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# *Recollections of a One-Room Schoolhouse*

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARIAN BROOKS

*I understand that you started teaching in a one-room rural school in New Hampshire. Would you tell us about those early years?*

When I graduated from high school in 1924, a scarcity of teachers brought representatives of the State Normal schools to the high schools to interview those of us who were considering teaching as a career. I was one of several students who were selected for an intensive six-week training program in the summer and assigned to schools in September. I was then 15 years old.

*What was that training program like?*

Very traditional, as I recall. It consisted of an overall course in methodology in the areas of reading, mathematics, history and geography, another in language arts that focused on spelling, writing and grammar, as well as courses in "classroom management," how to keep records and an overview of the New Hampshire state law requirements for teachers. We were, of course, introduced to various kinds of teaching materials, mainly textbooks. There was no training in child development and in ways that would help me consider children's personal needs.

*What was the school community like?*

I was hired to teach in a small one-room school in an Irish farming community of about 15 families who were living mostly on small dairy farms or working as laborers for the road construction contractors. Two families, whose children attended school, were French Canadian, living in the community on a temporary basis as workers for the small lumbering jobbers; they would move on when the "spring drive" of logs down the river was finished.

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There were six one-room schools situated on the outskirts of the town, which had a population of about 1000. These schools, with the two-room school in the town center, comprised the school district under the leadership of a superintendent who visited each school about once a month to bring supplies, check on the progress of the program and assist the teacher with any questions or problems she might have. About every two months all the teachers in the district met at his office for a conference.

*Did you live in the community?*

Yes, I lived with a young Irish couple with two young children, right across the road from the school. They lived the very simple life of a dairy farmer, which was pretty much the pattern of the community: up early in the morning to milk the cows, a big breakfast at 6:00, do the chores around the farm, some truck gardening, then milking time again in the late afternoon. Bedtime came early.

The community was 20 miles from the city of Berlin. On Saturday evening the family usually went to the city to shop and as recreation, sometimes to a movie. In the winter time, when the deep snows tended to keep the families closer to the warm hearth, they held Irish hoedowns on Saturday night. Sometimes they used the school, removing the desks to make room for the dancing, but most often they all gathered at a home, one that had a large room. With a fiddler in the corner they did Irish square dancing, stopping from time to time for refreshments prepared by the women of the community. Being a young teacher in the community made me the belle of the ball. It was great fun. I learned Irish square dancing, but most significant for me was feeling the community spirit of getting together and knowing the families in an informal setting. The children came to these dances, falling asleep in some corner as the evening became late.

School parties almost always involved parents. It was a tradition in the neighborhood that on Halloween Night children would go out after dark to the different houses and play tricks. We spent a lot of time in preparation for Halloween, designing and making costumes -- and trying to think up new tricks we could play. I raised the question with them: What's the meaning of Halloween, where did it originate? The older

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children read about the background of Halloween and wrote their own Halloween stories. On Halloween Night we went out, played our tricks, then we came back to the school and had a candy pull with the parents. You cook molasses candy until it gets quite hard but not brittle. Then you butter your hands and pull it -- stretch it out and fold it up and stretch it out and fold it up until it becomes very light colored and chewy when it cooks. That was fun to do even though we had quite a sticky mess to clean up the next day -- and they all pitched in and did it.

The parents seemed to have great respect for the teacher; I was considered a very important asset to the community. Teachers usually stayed not more than three years, so each new teacher brought something new to the life of the community.

*Tell us about the children; you seem to indicate that you knew them very well.*

Having only 11 children in Grades 1 to 8, I was able to see each child as an individual. I had two children in Grade 1, a very bright little girl in the eighth grade who planned to go to high school, two brothers in the sixth grade; the other children were in Grades 2 and 4. The older brother J. was not interested in school and was waiting for the time to pass when he would reach the age of 16 and legally leave school. His record card showed that he had repeated the earlier grades, and as learning became more and more difficult for him, he had been "passed on" year by year. I had been warned by the superintendent that J. had been a trouble-maker but that he must stay in school until the legal leaving age. I decided right from the beginning that I must try to win his support. Since he was a big adolescent I believed one should treat him with respect for his physical growth and his maturing development. I asked J. to help me with much of the manual work around the school. I was not only the teacher, I was also the janitor. The school was heated by a pot-bellied stove in the corner. J. would come early, for he lived nearby, and build the fire for me. Then he stayed at the end of the day to sweep and help me clean up. He and his brother painted some of the old tables that we used as work areas. At Christmas time he led



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the whole group out to the woods to find a tree to cut, then made the base for it. He liked to assume these responsibilities; they gave him a feeling of manliness, I believe, and also satisfied his need for my attention and approval. He was very close to my own age and we established a good comradeship.

I exerted no great pressure on J. to "learn the text books" for he had great difficulty with reading. But I did insist that he do some work every day: reading from a book he selected (his brother or I would read with him), helping the younger children with their math, taking part in the discussions I had with the older children about events in American history, and listening to the stories that I read. He enjoyed the books that I read to the older children at the close of each day, books such as *Pinnocchio*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. From my memories of my own home life and my contact with children, I knew that children of all ages like to be read to, especially from books that were above their own reading ability. Often G., the eighth grader who read very well, would read in my place.

I learned a lot about a young boy growing up from my talks with J., my observation and my reflection upon him, even though he gave me some anxious times. I think he passed the time with a better attitude toward himself and his relationship to others.

I had another pupil who demanded from me a lot of thought as to how to teach him. E. was a retarded child, at eight a big boy who had developed fast and was very lanky and awkward in his movements. He had been in the school for three years but was still in first grade. E. would compensate for his lack of success in learning by his size and physical strength, "picking" on the younger children who were superior to him in mastering reading and math. He walked three to four miles to school, as did two or three of the other children, which meant they ate lunch at school. E. used the lunch period for antagonizing the children and starting fist fights, in which he was always the winner.

My problem with E. was to find things that he could do that would give him a feeling of personal satisfaction as well as help him gain respect from the other children. He liked to

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draw; he liked to sing and to dance. His dancing was really quite delightful, with lots of rhythm and freedom and charged with a real joy. But because of his lankiness, a sort of loose jointedness, the children thought that he was funny and "nutty," as they called him. They laughed and poked fun at him, which of course set off more fist fights. He also liked dramatics, to play out stories and situations. His language was poor, as he had a severe speech impediment, but with his body he could express his idea of things and happenings. I praised him profusely for his dramatics, encouraged him to draw more, and wrote the stories that he told about his pictures which we displayed along with the drawings of the other children.

I myself liked to draw so we all did many drawings with pencil and crayons of our personal experiences, illustrations of our history studies and our frequent observations that we made of the world of nature. Paints were not available. These drawings were usually accompanied by written comments that the older children would write or assist the younger children in writing. Always before being displayed, each drawing was shared with the rest of the group. Since the children in Grades 1 and 2 finished school an hour earlier, our sharing time usually came before the lunch hour. I did not *purposefully* incorporate these informal reading-writing experiences as a way of acquiring the skills of reading and language; they were natural responses that came out of the atmosphere of living together as a group and sharing interests and achievements.

Out of my personal interest in M., the older sister of the two brothers, a common project developed which integrated many areas of learning. The mother in this family had died when the children were very young. By the age of 12, M. had become the woman of the household and had assumed many of its responsibilities, such as the planning and cooking of meals. M. often stayed after school and chatted about things in her home life. She needed a woman to talk with about her role in the life of the family, someone who could be responsive to her personal questions and needs. She was interested in her cooking so I gave her help in planning the meals and new recipes to try. She had difficulty with math, and I used her cooking interests to make her mathematics more meaningful for her; each

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Saturday she went with her father to buy food, so during the week we figured out what to buy and how much it would cost. Her father took great pride in M.'s mathematical accomplishment which I think was perhaps greater than his own. Since I made many of my own clothes, M. wanted to learn to sew. As I recall she made a petticoat and a dress -- again we planned together how much material to buy and how much it would cost so she could purchase everything on her next trip to town.

Of course the other girls wanted to sew also. Since it was natural for me to think of curtains for the windows, an item that very often was missing in their home setting, we made curtains. This became a good starting point for the whole group to learn about color and pattern as we planned how we could make our school a more colorful place. As I said before, the older boys painted some of our old tables.

*What guides did you use to structure the curriculum?*

I was required to follow the teaching guide issued by the State Department of Education and the textbooks in reading, math, spelling, grammar, history and geography. There were very few resource materials such as maps, games, supplementary reading books; these the teacher had to supply if she wished to have them in the classroom. I was also required to have posted a detailed timetable of each day's program, and I still recall the struggle I had in making a timetable that would include all the content areas: ten minutes of first grade reading, ten minutes of fourth grade reading, ten minutes of fourth grade math, and so on. But it was a greater and more frustrating struggle to follow it each day. I finally gave up, ignored it and went about establishing an organization that seemed to make more sense to me and the needs of the children.

We read together at the same time or did math together. I would work with one child, such as the little boy in first grade who needed my help in beginning to read, or with a group; the rest of the children would help each other. The fourth graders would read from their history text together as a group or individually if they

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wished, helping each other with the study problems at the end of the chapter or the one that I often gave them as a focus to structure our discussion later in the day. My very competent little girl in the eighth grade often read with the children in the second grade, then later I would work with them on the reading skills.

As I look back on those years I realize what a great learning experience it was for me as a beginning teacher. Sure, if I had had an experienced teacher to confer with and give me some sympathetic guidance and support I, no doubt, would have done a better job in reassessing my practices and making changes. But it was equally important for my own development that I was free from many outside pressures and had the time to find my own style of responding to the children and to discover ways of making learning and school an experience that they could become excited about and enjoy.

*With no experience as a teacher and little study, as you've said, of child growth and development, what model did you use for your observations of the children and your organization of their learning experiences?*

I grew up in a family of five children and in a neighborhood of many children of all ages. We were always an active group of children, recreating many of the adult activities of the community: playing lumbering, being a photographer, playing school, building treehouses, and so on. I enjoyed directing the play activities of the younger children. For my high school years, I went away to a boarding school and there often "sat" with the faculty children. I had had a lot of contact with children because I was interested in them and liked to be with them. I think I took my own experiences with children as the key to my observations of the children in this school.

As an individual I always had a very difficult time working within a rigid structure that didn't permit any deviations. I think that it was probably as much for my own comfort in the situation, a feeling "this is the way I can teach these kids the best." I couldn't teach in a tight structure, that is, reading from textbooks and answering questions and rigidly following the

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timetable. When I was working with a child or a group it didn't seem to make any sense to me to restrict the rest of the children to a very quiet, passive kind of activity when it was possible for them to work in an informal, family-like situation. While I would be teaching one child to read, for instance, the others would quite naturally turn to each other for help. There was much tutoring and reading together from the library books, especially project studies.

*Were there times when all the children worked together on a common activity?*

Yes. We did a lot of planning common activities together, and we always had at least one project that we worked at together. Working together came naturally once you set up an environment in which one didn't have to sit still and be silent and work alone but could talk and work with others. With the help of the two older boys, we took out some of the fixed desks that we weren't using and piled them up in the coat closet area so that we would have a larger space to work in together.

*Was it standard at that time for children to be seated behind nailed down desks?*

Most classrooms had rows of fixed desks with the teacher's desk at the center front. My desk, when I arrived at the school, was even set up on a raised platform. It came down very soon, was moved to a corner, and the platform became a great working area for the children or our stage for play making. When I asked the superintendent if I could remove some desks, he raised questions; he was somewhat fearful of my making the room more informal and flexible in its use. There had been a turnover of something like two or three teachers in the previous school year because they couldn't manage the older brothers, and this was his big concern, but as long as I wasn't having serious troubles with these boys he accepted the change.

To return to the question of common projects, I especially recall one that developed out of my reading of myths to the children. My eighth grade student G. got very excited about mythology; her parents were well educated and helped her to get books of myths from the city of

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Berlin library. These she brought to school to share with the rest of us, by reading or telling them to us. We wrote our own myths and had fun using myths in play making, improvising very simple costumes and props. As usual the children made many crayon drawings.

Thinking back on it, I realize how little I used the life of the community. Actually my real use of this was in my understanding of the family life of the children themselves. I used the natural life of the area more because of my interest in nature. These children had only a meagre awareness of the variety of animal and plant life right around them. They hardly knew how to watch the changes in nature. We began gathering many samples of leaves to take to the classroom, made flower collections, drew pictures of birds and animals, made feeding stations and bird houses out of scrap lumber that the children found at home. J. and his brother were especially helpful to the younger ones with the carpentry -- they knew how to handle the tools. The good readers did research from the books that I would bring them from my own personal library or from the Town Library. We took lots of walks around the area to look for developmental changes. Our school was right on the bank of a brook, so we had the possibility, especially in the spring, of using the brook and seeing what was happening there, such as the frog's eggs and the tadpoles that we took into the classroom to watch in their development. We didn't do any planting because the children knew more about planting than I did probably.

Another related experience that I recall as very exciting for the group happened in the early spring when dandelions were blooming everywhere. I have never seen a group of young children that could refrain from picking a bouquet of dandelions. These children kept our classroom arrayed in these bright yellow flowers. In their homes they ate the leaves as dandelion greens. One morning I urged them to look carefully at a dandelion flower for I found they were not really aware of its characteristics. We examined the arrangement of the petals, its hollow stem and leaves close to the ground, and so on. Then we went out to look for flowers that had not bloomed, still in bud. We located an isolated spot of dandelions that we fenced in with sticks so that we could watch what happened in their growth.

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Most of the children had blown the seeds to watch them float through the air but they had not put together the relationships of things beginning (being born), growing and making new seeds for the next year's growth, then dying. Nor had they examined the seed to see why it floated so easily. I showed them how to make a parachute from a handkerchief. We had many contests with parachutes, testing time, size, distance relationships. One little girl in the fourth grade made a book of the dandelion story, mounting the different parts and stages of development with written explanations.

One winter there was a lot of snow, with big drifts formed along the school yard fence. One of the things that we did, which I had done as a child, was to dig tunnels and caves in the drifts. Sitting in our caves one day I asked them how it would be to live in a snow house. After our conjuring up such a life I told them a little bit about the Eskimoes. The children's great curiosity led them to do some reading, looking at books and making a model of an Eskimo village. It was one of their first considerations of the fact that people live differently in different parts of the world.

When the spring rains came, the school yard became very muddy. The younger children loved the mud, making the usual cakes and pies from cans and jars, decorating them with sticks and stones and baking them in the sun. They also made houses and dikes for the rivers where they sailed their boats. I showed them how to strengthen the mud by mixing dried grasses and twigs. Many spontaneous play situations came out of this mud environment which they had created: the older children returned to their interest in myths and stories of knights and castles and joined the mud play making moats, castles, bridges. The children in Grades 1 and 2, who finished school at 2:30 p.m. and so had an hour to wait for brothers and sisters, spent that time in their own mud play. In the winter time they usually stayed inside, finding their own things to get involved in. It was an unsupervised time for them, with the only limitation that they must not interfere with the work of the older children. It was in this hour that I gave attention to G., my eighth grader, who had to learn beginning French and geometry for entrance to high school.



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*Did the six-week course give you help in assessing the child's learning? Can you describe how you reflected on what you were doing?*

The six-week course, as I remember, it focused only on methodology that I've already spelled out. I do not recall any consideration given to what children are like, how they learn, the kind of environment that you would provide to stimulate and support the individual child. Some attention was given to the making of tests and formal measurement as a means of grading children's academic achievement.

School was presented to us as a place where we were to teach children the basic curriculum areas following the syllabus issued by the State Department of Education. Learning was a passive activity: reading textbooks, memorizing content, answering the questions put forth by the teacher and taking tests. Learning was structured by the textbooks the school selected for use. That was pretty much the model of elementary schools all over the country with the exception of a few that had sensitive teachers and administrators who envisioned education as more than the mastery of those fundamentals that would have bearing on the child as an adult.

The teacher was the one to obey and the child was to do what he was told: "Read the books and remember what you have read, do your math exercises, learn to spell correctly and write in the Palmer method." The parents of the community had similar expectations for their children: that they would learn to read, to do arithmetic, to spell and write, and know historical dates and important events. Continuing education into the Berlin High School was not considered a "must"; many dropped out as soon as they reached the age of 16. G. was the only child in the community whose parents planned for her to go to high school. Actually the children of the family that I lived with went on to high school; that was because I talked the family into it. The young people tended to stay with the farm, marry and get a farm of their own. When J., for example, became 16, the one thing that he wanted most was to have a job. I talked with the men who took care of the roads about the possibility of giving him a job. In the spring in that area of the country there was always a lot of road upkeep, from the



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effects of the winter. J. went to work immediately.

At the end of the day as part of my planning and preparation for the next day, I would reflect on what had happened during the day, and what I was going to do with individual children who were at different levels of learning. With an organizational structure of usually one child to a grade, at the most perhaps three or four, one tended to think not about grade level accomplishments but about what the individual child was learning, what was coming forth from the group activities and the kinds of relationships that existed or were being developed. I drew upon our being together in an informal environment and the intimate relationships that we had established with each other.

It was not until five years later when I taught in Burlington, Vermont, under a principal who had recently graduated from Teachers College, that I was introduced to the ideas of John Dewey and William Heard Kilpatrick, ideas that confirmed my own teaching experiences. I also took courses in child psychology and sociology at the University of Vermont.

*You say you were visited by the superintendent about once a month. What happened during these visitations? Did he advise you as a helping teacher might do, or was the visit more of a supervisory check up?*

Mr. C. came about once a month and usually spent a couple of hours observing my teaching and commenting briefly on techniques and content that he thought I should give more emphasis to. He'd ask me if there was any way he could be of help to me, if I had any questions. He looked at my plans and records; he brought the supplies that I had requested at his previous visit. He also had monthly meetings in the town center with all the teachers of the district, but those meetings as I recall were concerned mainly with routine kinds of things. There was, of course, some sharing among the group of teachers and talking about things that we were doing. Sometimes Mr. C. would comment on a specific teaching technique that he had observed in a school and ask that teacher to tell the group about it.

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One time I remember he asked me to tell about the way I was teaching reading. The basic reading series was the old Winston Reader. The first reader was composed of the stories of Little Red Hen, the Ginger Bread Boy, and Three Billy Goats Gruff, and so on. Children loved the stories but the series as a whole, with its very heavy vocabulary load for beginning readers, often had a discouraging effect on their learning to read. The really great thing about these stories was that they had lots of repetition of words and sentences, one sequence building onto the other. I began to read the stories with the children, helping them to hear and see the repetition of words and phrases and not making it a burden for them to know every word. In this way they came to enjoy the stories. I had started by following very carefully the Teacher's Guide and expecting them to know the words through isolated word card drills. But I discarded this method when I realized how tedious it was for the children, so much so that they were acquiring a dislike for reading. We went on not only to read the stories together, but to read them over and over. They also learned the vocabulary that way.

It is interesting, as I think back about it now and have more knowledge about the process of learning to read, how much use I made of the repetitive patterns; to hear the repetitive sound patterns and to see the patterns of words, the patterns of phrases. At this teachers' meeting we discussed my method critically since Mr. C. had doubts as to whether I would get good results and the children would learn to read.

*This method was unique to him, but he was open to it?*

I believe that was one of his strengths as an administrator. He wasn't an educator who had real insights into the developmental process and how children learn -- but he was open-minded, and supportive of you if you had valid reasons for what you were doing, and he could see evidence that the children were learning.

*Were there many teachers of your own age in this school district? How long did you stay in this school?*

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Most of the teachers were young, new graduates from the two-year training program at the Normal Schools in the New England area. Teachers tended to stay in these one-room schools for two to three years and then move to the larger schools where the salary would be higher. I expect the need for professional companionship was another reason for the change. I stayed two years and then was transferred to the central school in a nearby town.

*What were you paid?*

\$720 for the year. My room and meals with the family cost me \$5 a week and if I went away for the weekend, the farmer's wife insisted that she take off a dollar! Still I saved enough of my salary to pay for my studies in the summer. (There was the requirement that to be rehired as a teacher one must continue study in the summer toward fulfillment of the state criteria for certification.)

*How was this school different from your first school?*

This school was in a small town with a mixed population of the original families and new families from French Canada and Prince Edward Island, who had been attracted to the town by the lumbering industry, its major occupation. There was a small nucleus of parents who were quite sensitive to the social changes in American life and to the reality that their children would not remain in the town on reaching adulthood. They felt therefore that the school should provide an education more in tune with their expectancies of the future. A few years earlier this group had influenced the town to consolidate all of its one-room schools into a central school so that the monies could be spent to better advantage, that is, for better qualified teachers and expansion of the educational program to include the first two years of high school. As well as the usual academic subjects, a student was required to take the new high school program including manual arts and home economics. The subjects were viewed as points of departure to a life into the broader industrialized society. Some of the youth completed the high school program by attending a high school in a larger nearby town, living with families or attending

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a semi-private academy where dormitories were available. When I came to the town a few of the youth were attending college.

There were four teachers in the school: one for the lower grades 1 - 3, a second for the middle grades 4 - 6, and two in the upper grades 7 - 10. I taught the lower grades, with approximately 24 children. Here as in the first school, I viewed these children as a group of learners rather than as children at the different grade levels, even though I was responsible for a graded curriculum based on the State syllabus or textbooks. I continued many of the same patterns that I had developed in my first school; working with one child or small group, with the rest of the class working cooperatively together on their assigned work or individual interest. The first graders finished the day an hour earlier. Those who came on the bus were more or less responsible for their own activities or play during that hour, either outside or in the classroom depending on the weather or their interests. Often they painted, made drawings or worked on constructions, as we did a lot of construction from paper, boxes and wood. They all were pretty familiar with woodworking tools from their home experiences.

I recall one project that all the children were involved in: making, on a large sand table, a model of the lumbering industry. We depicted the cutting of the trees in the winter, taking them to the river bank where in the spring floods the logs were "driven" down the river to the pulp and paper mills in Berlin, 30 miles away. The older children in Grade 3 added displays of products that were made from the pulp and how it was made into paper. One day after school, a group of us went to the "river drivers" camp built on the river bank near the town, to talk with these men when they came in at the end of the day. They were the itinerant workers who moved with the logging jobs, and they had exciting adventures and stories to relate to the children while we ate the big molasses cookies that the camp cook gave us. Some parents had cautioned their children to stay away from river drivers as being bad men but the visit gave us lots of answers to our questions and also raised many new ones about the life of the river driver. Some of the

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children had fathers who worked on the lumbering jobs, so that these young children had had some firsthand contacts with the lumbering industry, hearing about the daily happenings. Yet it was the first time, I believe, that they had sensed the special life these men lived. Our visit helped them put together observations and to understand the continuity of process and human activities, from the tree in the forest to the sheet of paper that they might be writing upon. While much of my teaching I would consider today as inadequate learning-teaching practices, this particular activity did reach deeply into the lives of these children, offered them many meaningful ways to use language, reading, mathematics in social living that came from the mutual sharing of experience.

The reading program for the beginners was very boring to me to teach; the Aldine Readers that I was required to use began with such material as: "Page 1: This is a ball. The ball is red. Page 2: This is baby. Baby plays with the ball. Baby plays with the red ball." I remembered my own first grade teacher and the way that she had made reading an enjoyable and exciting experience by writing adaptations of the old folk tales and myths for us to read. I used her as my model and wrote large books (charts) on folk tales, using many of those from the Winston series. We read them together. It was not unusual at other times during the day to see small groups of children gathered around a story, reading it to each other. Meeting this teacher, later as a teenager, we talked about the books that she had written, her love for literature, and, as small children, our own lack of interest in the primers that were required and the scarcity of good literature and books in the classroom. She too had been a beginning teacher, graduated from a liberal arts college majoring in literature, who found the reading program uninspiring for both herself and the children.

Each summer I would attend a summer school for a period of six weeks to continue my work toward the attainment of a teaching diploma and certification. It was during the fifth summer and on completion of the requirements that I was offered a teaching position in Burlington, Vermont. This change offered me several opportu-

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nities to reassess my ideas about children and teaching. I fortunately had as principal of the school in which I taught, a young woman who had just completed a doctorate at Teachers College under Kilpatrick and Rugg and was committed to the philosophy of viewing the child as the center of the learning experience and using the curriculum to support the growth of the individual child. The Superintendent also supported her in her attempts to break away from strict adherence to the syllabus and textbooks. She liked the things that I told her about the way I had worked with the children in my previous schools and wished me to establish a similar program in this first grade, individualizing it to allow children to progress each at his own pace. We became intimate friends and had many discussions about the ideas of Dewey, Kilpatrick, and Rugg's *Child Centered School*, which I had begun to read. I also began studies as a non-matriculated student at the University of Vermont and got into those areas that I was personally interested in: biological sciences, psychology, and sociology.

I left Burlington at the end of two years with many regrets, for not only had I been very happy there but my own thinking about children, learning, and school had been profoundly challenged by the progressive leadership in the school system. But the lights of Boston beckoned, and Boston University seemed to be the place for me to complete my studies for a B.S. degree.

*This interview was conducted in June 1974 by ARTHUR TOBIER, then co-editor of publications for the Workshop Center for Open Education.*

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MARIAN BROOKS, Professor Emeritus of City University, began her teaching career in a one-room school in northern New Hampshire. After four years in rural schools, she worked in the public schools of Burlington, Vermont as a first grade teacher, then in Lexington, Massachusetts, first as a teacher and later an assistant principal, at the same time finishing her undergraduate studies at Boston University with a minor in music education. Following a period as supervisor of music in the elementary schools of Needham, Massachusetts, she took a leave of absence to study at Teachers College with Harold Rugg and George Counts and to extend her interests in music education and child psychology. As an assistant to Professor Rugg she helped him organize a luncheon-discussion group of students who met weekly with persons prominent in the various educational disciplines, the arts and social action.

Professor Brooks came to City College in 1948 to teach in elementary education, later becoming Chairman of the Department of Elementary Education. In 1967, she invited Lillian Weber, with whose background in early childhood education she was already familiar, to join the faculty. She welcomed the expanded view of school possibilities that Professor Weber had studied in England. Since that time she has been intimately identified with the development of the Open Corridor program in New York City public schools and with the City College Advisory Service to Open Corridors. After her retirement in 1972, she joined the staff of the Workshop Center for Open Education where she serves as consultant.

The entire proceedings of the ROOTS OF OPEN EDUCATION IN AMERICA conference, together with an Annotated Bibliography of related readings, will be published on January 1, 1976. Copies at \$5.00 each may be obtained on written request accompanied by payment to:

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